

# UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

## Paving the Way for Women Entrepreneurs

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### Transcript

[TEXT: Young African Leaders Initiative Online Training Series]

I am E. Diane White and this is *Paving the Way for Women Entrepreneurs*.

In this lesson, we will affirm the pivotal role women play in a nation's economy. We'll take a look at gender bias constraints that women face in creating new businesses. And we'll talk about strategies and tools to address certain types of gender discrimination, including negative gender stereotyping that can keep women from succeeding in business.

As an entrepreneur, mentor and advocate for gender equality, I've spent much of my career promoting opportunity for women and girls. Women are necessary contributors to economic development and creating jobs. And in the quest for equal opportunity, men have and should continue to play important roles — accepting that women are entrepreneurs, that they must have access to financing, and that their inclusion in business networks is critical to any country's entrepreneurial success.

Women, as farmers, entrepreneurs, traders and innovators, are key to unlocking economic growth. When women succeed, they produce a multiplier effect, investing a greater share of their earnings in the well-being of their families and community, creating long-term benefits for generations to come.

But women face barriers that limit their contribution and hamper their progress. They're held back by discriminatory laws and regulations which deny them access to credit, property, markets, technology, information and training.

Gender discrimination is defined as prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. It affects both men and women, but primarily women. It is linked to stereotypes and gender roles and may include the belief that one gender is intrinsically superior to another.

Gender discrimination is often rooted deeply in sociocultural traditions and practices and may be embedded in the norms and assumptions that guide decision-making and business behavior.

Women in business confronting discrimination or gender bias may feel like they are shadow boxing with an opponent they cannot see clearly. But the potential adverse impact of gender bias or discrimination on women and their business should not be underestimated. It can pose as great a barrier to success to an entrepreneur as not having access to the capital, market information, and professional networks needed to grow an enterprise or advance a career.

Gender discrimination may be so pervasive in society that, without meaning to, women sabotage themselves, internalizing views about gender roles that do not serve women in business.

Let's look at four of the most common gender-bias-related obstacles women encounter in business and the workplace, and how to deal with them.



**Not being taken seriously.** Women may find that their professional views, opinions and advice are not regarded as valuable as their male colleagues'. Their contribution at a business meeting, for example, may be ignored and only accepted after a man validates it. It may also take women longer than their male counterpart to establish themselves as experts in their field.

These attitudes are deep-seated and will not change overnight. As a woman entrepreneur, your focus should be on building your credibility. Know what you're talking about. Over-prepare for meetings. Be able to defend your position with facts and figures. Be strategic in what you concede and never lose sight of your long-term goals.

Don't expect to win everybody over. But as your credibility grows, you will win converts, colleagues and business associates who recognize and value your contribution.

Family members and friends may also be belittling, dismissing a woman's business as a hobby not to be taken seriously. Women should focus on identifying a more supportive network. Start with the local women's business association. You will find women entrepreneurs and professionals there with your same level of drive and ambition. They will mirror back that it's really OK to want what you want. You don't need a cast of thousands. One or two women friends whose values you share can give you the support you need.

**Self promotion.** Women are often taught not to brag or boast about their achievements and accomplishments. Self-promotion is fine for men, but frowned upon and considered unladylike for women.

But how will a banker or potential investor know how good a product or service is unless you tell them? How will they know about the great supplier you've found, the new client you've just landed, or the sales goal you just exceeded if you keep quiet?

Women should focus on identifying the three or four big accomplishments that really tell the story of their business and set it apart. Practice speaking them out loud so you are fluent. Develop your own boasting style. No need to imitate men here. Be you and speak in your voice. Pick up tips from very successful business women in your community. Pay attention to how they talk about their accomplishments and use that as your guide.

**Too much approval seeking.** Many women are taught to be nice, not make waves, and please everyone. These are traits that can cost them professionally and in business.

Women might not fight for the promotion they know they deserve because they're afraid to anger their boss. They may accept less than the product or service is worth because they don't want to appear demanding. Women might acquiesce at a critical point in negotiations because they're afraid the opposing party will be mad at them. A woman might not reprimand or fire a wayward employee because they're too busy trying to be their friend.

Being a people pleaser will not serve you. In business and at work, you're going to have to make some tough calls and take some unpopular positions to advance yourself and your enterprise.

The people-pleasing habit is one of the hardest to break. Start with small steps and be patient with yourself. Focus on knowing your priorities. Know the difference between must-do and nice-to-do. Determine what you absolutely must do. Be ruthless in this assessment. Practice standing up for yourself and your business. Practice saying no, first on small things that do not advance your interests or priorities and then bigger things as you gain confidence. Saying no is a muscle you develop and it gets stronger with use.

***Fear of technology.*** With women as the primary caregivers in most societies, their choices and mobility can be limited. One solution to this challenge is the availability of new technologies that can expand a business's reach beyond the local economy. Technology can allow women entrepreneurs to find investment and customers outside their immediate communities. It's a myth that men are more knowledgeable about technology. Seek out training programs that teach how to use and adapt technology to your entrepreneurial ideas.

Gender equality is smart business. The world can ill afford to allow the business and economic potential of half the world's population to go untapped. Women can do all of these things to make sure they are ready to be entrepreneurs. And men can make sure that their mothers, sisters, wives and friends know these important tools and help foster their entrepreneurial dreams.

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